

[BEGIN AUDIO]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: June 13th 1994 at 9:30 a.m. by the National Park Service, American Memorial Park Saipan, in cooperation with Marianas Cablevision. The subject is Joseph Garofalo, veteran of the Marianas campaign. The interviewer is Daniel Martinez from the National Park Service, USS Arizona in Hawaii.

Joe: can you, for the record, state your full name? Spell your last name for us.

JOHN GAROFALO: Joseph John Garofalo. G-A-R-O-F-A-L-O.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Where were you born?

JOHN GAROFALO: I was born right in the South Bronx, New York.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: What date?

JOHN GAROFALO: November 15, 1920.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: What were your parents' names?

JOHN GAROFALO: My mother was Maria, my father was Francesco, which his Frank, yeah. They both came from [PH] Calabria, southern Italy. And my father came here about, in 1918. He was here a few months and immediately joined the army and found in France. World War I.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Had he met your mother yet?

JOHN GAROFALO: He got married right after that.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So they were recent arrival immigrants from Italy, landing in New York?

JOHN GAROFALO: Right. They knew each other from the other side. Old country. Right.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: From the old country, as they say. How many brothers and sisters did you have?

JOHN GAROFALO: One sister, Lucy.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: and of your family, are there still members alive?

JOHN GAROFALO: Just my sister. My mother passed away at the age of 102 ½. About six, seven years ago.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: How old are you now?

JOHN GAROFALO: I'm gonna be 74.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: 74. So you have a sister left. Where does she live?

JOHN GAROFALO: In West Palm Beach, Florida.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: I see. What was life like growing up in New York?

JOHN GAROFALO: Well, we didn't have much. There was a depression but I think we had more fun at the time than the [INDISCERNIBLE] that they do have.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: What kind of fun did you have?

JOHN GAROFALO: Looking for newspapers to sell, looking for deposit bottles to get 2 cents, once we reached a dime, we'd go to the theater. And we played hopscotch and all those....

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Stickball?

JOHN GAROFALO: Stickball, definitely.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: What was your favorite team in New York? You had a lot of baseball teams to choose from.

JOHN GAROFALO: Yeah, I always liked the New York Giants.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: The Giants. How was life like, for instance, educationally? Did you go to public school, catholic school?

JOHN GAROFALO: I went to public school. Then I went to high school and I was shy 6 months graduating, but I went to Bronx Vocational High School and completed a course in Auto Repairs. Then I went [PH] Samuel Gompers, of course, printing. And I went to work immediately.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And this was in the 1930s?

JOHN GAROFALO: Right.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: With World War II approaching, how did you get involved with the military?

JOHN GAROFALO: As soon as I heard Pearl Harbor. I'd never heard the words before. "Pearl Harbor."

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Didn't even know where it was?

JOHN GAROFALO: Correct. Then of course, reading the papers and the radio. No television. Some of my friends started to go. I had a number. We all had numbers, but before my number came, I enlisted.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You're talking about those draft numbers, right?

JOHN GAROFALO: Correct. Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Before you were drafted, you said "I'm gonna choose my own fate."

JOHN GAROFALO: Correct. That's it.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You chose what.

JOHN GAROFALO: The CB's.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: US Navy.

JOHN GAROFALO: US Navy CB's, yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You wanted to be in the Construction Battalion.

JOHN GAROFALO: Because I always liked carpentry.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You had some basic training in those areas, right?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yeah, prior to going into the service, for 9 months I worked for the Electric Boat Company in New Jersey and worked on PT boats. Incidentally, I started with PT 102 to PT 268. I worked on Kennedy's PT 109.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Is that right?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Obviously you didn't know that then.

JOHN GAROFALO: No, I didn't [LAUGHS].

DANIEL MARTINEZ: When did you realize you'd worked on that famous PT boat?

JOHN GAROFALO: Well, as soon as it came out that he was... As soon as the story broke that cut PT 109 in half in the [PH] Solomons.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: That's an interesting story. What was your training like? When you went in for basic training, what was that like?

JOHN GAROFALO: I went to [PH] Camp Bradford, Virginia. It was horrible because it was a new base, all mud. Tents, and from there I...

DANIEL MARTINEZ: No barracks, right? You were out in the open.

JOHN GAROFALO: [OVERLAPPING] Just tents. That's it. No barracks.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Who drilled you?

JOHN GAROFALO: Various people.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: What did you think of that drill?

JOHN GAROFALO: Well, I always liked calisthenics and sports....

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You [INDISCERNIBLE] right?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yes. And then I went to Davisville, Rhode Island for further advanced training. From there, I was in the 53rd Battalion. They broke us up, and then I was assigned to [PH] Camp Lejeune.

We had a fourth marine division formed. We were known as "third battalion, 20th engineers." But, we were the 121st CB's. So we had two titles. It's a little confusing. [LAUGHS]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Yeah. Okay, well we'll try to keep that unconfused. Training with the marines, that must have been a pretty different experience.

JOHN GAROFALO: Marines. Yes, it was.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: They have a different outlook on military life. Can you share some with me?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yeah. Yes. Well, we had the rifle range, maneuvers, 20 mile hikes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So you're telling me you had to do everything marines did?

JOHN GAROFALO: Of course. Definitely.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And you had those big marine sergeants barking at you?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yes. Especially the southerners. [LAUGHS]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: The southern marine sergeants.

JOHN GAROFALO: Yes. As soon as they see a New Yorker, like a vulture they attack.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: What kind of treatment? Can you describe some of that to me?

JOHN GAROFALO: In the way they try to intimidate you, "I'm gonna fix you New Yorkers."

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Okay. They like your accent a lot, or did you like their accents?

JOHN GAROFALO: [LAUGHS] I liked their accent. Believe it or not, I think people from the East Coast, New York, Jersey, Connecticut, I think we're in better condition than those from the south.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: How's that?

JOHN GAROFALO: In maneuvers, in training, we excelled. Maybe because we were chased all the time, I don't know. [LAUGHS]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: [LAUGHS] Kind of a hard life in New York, I guess?

JOHN GAROFALO: Well, there was crime. You know.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Yeah. It was a different era, wasn't it? Yeah.

JOHN GAROFALO: I went in October '42, active service November '42, Camp Bradford Virginia. Then from then, I went to Davisville in the beginning of 1943, and right to [PH] Camp Lejeune.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Once you were done with advance training at [PH] Camp Lejeune, when did they ship you overseas?

JOHN GAROFALO: No, they shipped us to Camp Pendleton for more advanced training.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So you went to the San Diego area. And what happened there?

JOHN GAROFALO: We had training, a lot of maneuvers, amphibious, a lot of full pack 20 mile hikes. They really put you in shape there. Then we went on board ship, like we were leaving for overseas. Then we came back, again, on board ship. So we thought it was maneuvers.

At that time, Walter Winchell the columnist had predicated that the fourth marine division will receive at least 90 percent casualties. I don't know why that was stated, and that they're leaving from San Diego.

That's why this went back and forth. And one day we left, and the first thing we hit was enemy territory. No stopover anywhere.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So you left from San Diego with this marine division, and where were you headed?

JOHN GAROFALO: [INDISCERNIBLE] Roi-Namur. In the Marshall group.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Was that your first combat experience?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: What was that like?

JOHN GAROFALO: Well, we had all our pack ready. It was still dark. It started to lighten up a little. I look at the horizon and I see movement and three Japanese on a

raft with charges to blow up our ship. This is before we even got off the boat. It was weird, you know?

So immediately we start shooting at them. Then behind me, one navy fellow with a .20 millimeter was on these men on a raft. That was it.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: It strikes me that you recall that incident as very, very different tactically than the way Americans would fight.

JOHN GAROFALO: Yes. Then we landed, and it was... I was light. I was about 126 pounds. I was a runner.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And how tall are you?

JOHN GAROFALO: I was about close to five six. Five-five and a half.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And you say you were a runner. Tell us what a runner is.

JOHN GAROFALO: A runner is a guy that just runs with orders, and gets shot at while the others are laying down. So you've gotta zigzag [LAUGHS]. But when I landed in the Marshalls, I was so seasick that when the rain came down, this [PH] Renato Biancki, who was in my platoon, from North Adams, Massachusetts, he was a big guy. He dragged me into a shell hole. I was there about five minutes and I regained....

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So you were seasick from being on the landing craft?

JOHN GAROFALO: [OVERLAPPING] Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Just pitching and rolling?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yeah.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Had you ever been seasick before?

JOHN GAROFALO: Not really.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Must have been a terrible experience.

JOHN GAROFALO: Oh, it's awful.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So, not only are you feeling terrible, but people on that beach are trying to kill you right?

JOHN GAROFALO: [LAUGHS] Besides, yeah.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So you regained your stability, and what happened next?

JOHN GAROFALO: Well, then I don't know if I should say this. My battalion...my company commander, it was like he wanted me to get his pack, do this, all under fire. And this happened on Saipan. The same thing. Saipan was real hot.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: We'll get to that. What happened? He was having you pull...?

JOHN GAROFALO: He was...how could I explain? He was like a prima donna. Carry my pack, look for my hat, you know. Stuff like that.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So you were like.... He thought you were his dog-robber?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yeah, right. And then, the island was about to be secured, I don't know how many days, and then we went back on board ship. While we went on board, I was all the way on the bottom, right on top of the [PH] keel.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: [INDISCERNIBLE]?

JOHN GAROFALO: No, it was a [SOUNDS LIKE] Liberty ship. Yes, APA. While I'm down below, during the night, hell broke loose. A Japanese plane flew over the island and we were at the dock. And it dropped bombs and hit an ammo dump.

And quite a few men were lost. Now, people were running trying to leave the ship. And there was a ladder with a chain banister, and I'm just watching and nobody could leave it was such a bottleneck. So I stood there. If we get hit, we get hit. No use worrying about it.

JOHN GAROFALO: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Do you recall seeing your first dead enemy? And what that experience was like?

JOHN GAROFALO: It didn't bother me. It was right there, Roi-Namur.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: How about American?

JOHN GAROFALO: Well, that bothered me. But you just look and you just continue.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Did you lose any of your friends there?

JOHN GAROFALO: I lost a couple, a different company, same battalion, during that blast at night. I can't recall their names, you know.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Right. After that action, was your next stop Saipan?

JOHN GAROFALO: No. Next stop was Maui. For more training. More maneuvers.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And that was in preparation for this?

JOHN GAROFALO: For Saipan. Right.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Okay. Now, were you in [PH] Westlock, Pearl Harbor when those LST's exploded? Or did you miss that?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yeah, I wouldn't know. Wouldn't know.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: There were some LST's moored there, and they were part of Operation Forager, and they exploded. You may have not been there.

JOHN GAROFALO: We had to be there, because I was on a detail. They took us in the mountain. I was into carpentry. We had to build an area for I don't know how many. Probably a dozen platforms for tents.

So we were there for about 10 days. We brought one cook, and we stood there in the mountain for...in Maui. That was the greatest thing. We worked hard, but we had a cook everyday.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Good food, huh?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yeah.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Because the alternative food was, what?

JOHN GAROFALO: The usual. Spam.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Or sea rations!

JOHN GAROFALO: SOS... [LAUGHS] The sea rations were later on.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: When you get in the campaigns?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yeah.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Let's move this up to.... Did they tell you that you were headed toward Saipan?

JOHN GAROFALO: No.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So....

JOHN GAROFALO: We were told....

DANIEL MARTINEZ: How did they tell you that you were gonna land, was that a few days at sea? Or....

JOHN GAROFALO: No. It was, like, 2 days before the landing. It was put rather crudely. This colonel wanted our attention, "I'm gonna tell you right now that a lot of you are not coming back." He was very blunt. "We're hitting a group called the Marianas. And the island of Saipan." Which nobody heard of.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Right.

JOHN GAROFALO: And June 15th, we disembarked and so many hundreds of [PH] LCVPs, amphibious combo'ed into the tractor, they go on land and sea, and we headed out. Some time in the morning. It wasn't the first or second wave, but it was in the morning.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Had you watched the bombardment from your ship?

JOHN GAROFALO: Oh yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: What's that like? I've never experienced that.

JOHN GAROFALO: The bombardment, I felt my God it's gonna be easy when we get there. There's nothing left. That's what we thought.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: It went on for hours, right?

JOHN GAROFALO: It went on for days.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And you witnessed a lot of that, then? Then you figured this should be....

JOHN GAROFALO: [OVERLAPPING] Yes. It's gonna be a snap, you know? And as we're rendezvousing, they give you a little mimeographed map where you're gonna land. So I noticed a sugar sack, the sugar mill. And we're supposed to land to the right of it. At that time, it was called Chalan Kanoa.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: What was the name of your beach where you were gonna land?

JOHN GAROFALO: Blue Beach 2.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Blue Beach 2?

JOHN GAROFALO: Right. And all of a sudden, I'm studying the mimeograph, I don't see no landing. I see the island of Saipan disappearing. I said, Chief Sullivan, I have to tell you he wasn't that bright.

I said, Chief, look, there's no more island. We're supposed to land just to the right of the stack. Oh, he knows what he's doing.... Meanwhile, I look up and the [INDISCERNIBLE] is in shock. He's just staring into space.

So one of the fellas got up and slapped him until he regained consciousness. We were nine men carrying loads of ammo, no personnel, headed towards Tinian.

At that time, I don't know, 19,000 Japanese and 9 Americans. And they open up at us.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Was this on the afternoon of the 15th?

JOHN GAROFALO: No, still in the morning. We didn't hit Saipan yet. We were headed for the wrong island. This is a first. And the Japanese start artillery shells. One hit so close that the boat tipped, and I can't swim. We got full of water.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You're in the navy and you can't swim? [LAUGHS]

JOHN GAROFALO: No, most of us couldn't! [LAUGHS] And a couple of shells nearby. Meanwhile, you can't turn around like a car. It took time, and then we headed to Saipan.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Would it be safe to say some of you were a little concerned if not frightened at the prospect of those shells landing close?

JOHN GAROFALO: We were all frightened, but I find humor in everything. I don't know why.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So you were a one man invasion craft at Tinian that got turned back, huh?

JOHN GAROFALO: Nine men on one boat.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You get squared away and head back, what's it like landing on Saipan?

JOHN GAROFALO: Oh, boy. Steady fire. Steady fire, dead all around.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: The beach is strewn with dead? Tremendous gunfire? Incoming?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yes. We were there and we couldn't advance. Finally after a couple hours we advanced a little, I would say maybe 100 feet, that's all.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Did you come down a raft onto the beach?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Did you land on the beach itself or have to wade in? Under fire?

JOHN GAROFALO: I had to wade in a little, under fire. Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Did the words of that marine colonel start to haunt you?

JOHN GAROFALO: Oh, [PH] John Partridge. I forgot. It was very intense, the fire. A lot of men were running out into the ocean and drowning. That was what a friend of mine, [PH] Richard Ernst, he was learning to be an engineer....

He says, “Garofalo, it’s very hot. Let’s go!” I said, where? “I don’t know.” As soon as he left, he got hit and blew part of his foot off. The heel.

And I remained. If I’m gonna get it, I’ll get it. Meanwhile, I’m looking at the beach, which is less than 100 feet. I see men running this way picking up more running this way, panic. Some were sitting down crying.

Just [SOUNDS LIKE] hitting their fists on the ground.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: A lot of confusion, fear, huh? The Japanese were laying in pretty accurate fire, huh?

JOHN GAROFALO: Very accurate. From [PH] Mount Appachu. Later on I went there and I could count every hole.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Is that right? So how did you finally get off the beach? And how long were you down there?

JOHN GAROFALO: D-Day Night, still no sleep. They open up a battery of.... One is a personal friend from the same neighborhood. There were ten I don’t know if they were 75’s or 105’s. Ten of them. The Japanese opened up and hit every one from one to ten and wiped everybody out.

I’m looking amongst the dead to see my friend [PH] Emil Schweitzer.

Lo and behold, I found him. He was so frightened, he buried himself. And I found him and had to give him whatever socks I had.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: He was still alive, huh?

JOHN GAROFALO: He was the only one.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: From your neighborhood?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yes. And then, the D-Night was horrible. All kind of flares. One Japanese sneaked in, I don’t know how, and lobbed a grenade into a hole, and it killed a friend of mine, [PH] Montessi from Massachusetts. The grenade blew up, the screams were horrible.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: He didn't die right away? Was there a lot of...

Stereotypically, you always hear that there's chatter back and forth between American troops and the Japanese troops. Did that actually happen?...

JOHN GAROFALO: Yeah. I'll get to that. Then my friend was hit, [PH] Hank Gephardt from Long Island. He was like a movie star.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Good looking kid? These were all people from the 121st?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yeah. He was, I'm a little.... [STARTS SOBBING] He was covered with a poncho. And next to him was a [PH] "shimaru," old lady. She was covered.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So there was not only...your dead, but there was civilian dead there, wow.

JOHN GAROFALO: Oh, civilians, loads. Yeah.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Loads of them that were caught.

JOHN GAROFALO: And then D-Plus-Two, or D-Plus-Three, they were supposed to open up. The Japs were attacking us again from the front.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: These were the big charges?

JOHN GAROFALO: No, on landing crafts. But evidently they didn't reach us.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Okay. Did you guys have any idea what was going on, were things starting to shape up a little better?

JOHN GAROFALO: No. D-Plus-Four, we went [PH] Oseleto. We were the first ones there, and we didn't have brooms, nothing to clear the field. We used branches on our hands and knees removing debris.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: At [PH] Oseleto Field?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: None of your equipment was there?

JOHN GAROFALO: No.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Where was it? Who knows, right?

JOHN GAROFALO: Who knows. We didn't make ready for a plane to land, you know? Then the next day, some armed unit came in, engineers, they helped up. I didn't know there were a lot of Japanese planes undamaged.

We had moved into hangars. Meanwhile, [PH] Pete LeBlanc, he's from Massachusetts, I find this out years later, that he saw this plane being burnt. I've seen fires, but I didn't know it was Amelia Earhart plane, which Thomas E. Devine, that wrote The Amelia Earhart Incident, he was with the army unit there.

If you read the book, he states that he was with another fella walking towards the plane and passed the number. He wrote everything down. It was her Lockheed. And he saw a man in a white shirt, and it was [PH] James Forrestal, at that time Secretary with the navy. What is he doing on Saipan like D-Plus-5 or 6, you know? And he gave orders to have the plane burnt. Set on fire. I didn't see it.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You didn't witness it but the story was told to you? Was it told to you at the time, or after the war?

JOHN GAROFALO: Well, I don't recall. Because I've seen fires. I've seen planes burnt, but I never thought it was Amelia Earhart's plane. But fellas from my outfit did see it. And if you read the book The Amelia Earhart Incident, you would....

DANIEL MARTINEZ: That's where some of that comes from?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Any of those fellas still alive today?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yeah, [PH] Pete LeBlanc is still alive.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So you're clearing the airfield, which is your job, to get that ready to bring in American fighters and bombers. Does your equipment ever show up?

JOHN GAROFALO: Later on. But other outfits that came after came with all their equipment. We seemed to have nothing all the time. We had to scavenge, steal....

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Did you use any Japanese equipment at all?

JOHN GAROFALO: Oh, definitely.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: What kind of equipment would you use from the Japanese?

JOHN GAROFALO: We used their rakes, their shovels, we used hammers, wheelbarrows, until we got ours.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Any tractors, or steamrollers? Anything like that available from the Japanese?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yes. They had. But we didn't need it. That was years later on Tinian. And then we were there [INDISCERNIBLE].

DANIEL MARTINEZ: When was the island finally secure?

JOHN GAROFALO: I think July 9th.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Were you witness to any of these charges the Japanese mounted against you?

JOHN GAROFALO: Oh yes. Planes being shot down.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So the fighting was really intense?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yeah. We were staffed on the beach many times.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: By Japanese planes?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yeah. I've gotta give them credit. They have nerve which is incredible.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So they're very, very determined fighters?

JOHN GAROFALO: Oh yes. Definitely.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Tell me about the sugar mill. When did that all happen?

JOHN GAROFALO: Well, the sugar mill, after it burnt down, the next day I left to scavenge. We went there, [PH] Lenny Delumus and other members. And I'm looking around. And I see this belt. [SOUNDS LIKE] The crest is all decaying from the island.

Very wide, I don't know, over two feet wide, and went up at least four stories. A lot of leather. Being I used to help my uncle at shoe repair and shined shoes from him on Saturdays, I took my knife and I was cutting the belt.

But before I completed cutting, I made sure I cleared an area to run. When the belt finally came down, we cut slabs and said to my friends, please carry this back.

"What are we gonna do with it?" ...

"Carry it back."

And then we took it to Tinian. We invaded Tinian.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Strips of the leather?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yeah.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: The reason you had to run is it was under a lot of pressure, right? It could boomerang and hurt you if it hit you?

JOHN GAROFALO: Oh, definitely. It would kill ya. [LAUGHS]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So you took this leather with you over to Tinian to work on the airfield?

JOHN GAROFALO: Well, yeah. After the battle we worked on the airfield, then we set up a little cobbler shop. The fourth marine division had islands of leather and heels and soles and nobody knew what to do with it.

Even the machines that came were all stripped. We had to put them together. It took us days to figure it out. A buddy of mine, [PH] Lenny Delumus helped some fellow by the name of [PH] Beady from Georgia. He was a cobbler. So the three of us put up this little shack which I have pictures up, and we repaired shoes for the outfit.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: For the marines?

JOHN GAROFALO: For the 121st and some marines. But the officers and their girlfriends and nurses had to put leather lifts on that came from the leather sugar mill. And the officer's heels and soles. [LAUGHS]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Did you make anything personally out of that?

JOHN GAROFALO: Well, no. Just knife sheaths, you know, that I made.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Do you have one with you?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yes, this was mine, which I'm donating to the museum. This is my original knife.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You carried that here at Saipan?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And on Tinian?

JOHN GAROFALO: And Tinian.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Can you hold the sheath out in front so we can get a good look at it? And this was made out of the...?

JOHN GAROFALO: Leather from the belt that crushed the sugar cane.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So that's a genuine Saipan artifact.

JOHN GAROFALO: Definitely. I used [PH] Nitsford Oil to keep it pliable.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: That's 50 years old.

JOHN GAROFALO: About 51, or 50, you know?

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Yeah. That's terrific.

JOHN GAROFALO: So this goes to the museum.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Well, great! Tell us a little bit about your impression of Saipan after the battle was over. There was still fighting going on with certain units still sniping?

JOHN GAROFALO: Oh yeah.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Were you subject to sniping on the airfield?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yes. Periodically, yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And when you had the airfield secured, what were you living in then?

JOHN GAROFALO: [INAUDIBLE] No, we were living in foxholes, which were dug pretty deep. And we used Japanese oil drums filled with stones for extra protection.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Shrapnel, things like that?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yeah.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: That's where you'd live, you'd sleep in there? Did you have hot foot?

JOHN GAROFALO: It was a long time before we had hot food. Yeah.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So everything was sea rations. When did the planes start arriving?

JOHN GAROFALO: We had a P47 land the day after we cleared [PH] Oseleto Airfield. Planes were landing.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Then the B29s came eventually?

JOHN GAROFALO: On Tinian, yes. We lived in a "shanty town" as we called it, you'll can in the book later on. Finally, we got some tents.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Let's talk about Tinian. When were you sent.... Did you go in on the invasion forces there too?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: What was that like?

JOHN GAROFALO: Rather Calm

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Not as intense as Saipan?

JOHN GAROFALO: .No, but the beach is very small, couldn't be more than a couple hundred yards, the whole beach. Some landings were made...we develop...one unit came the day before on the landing crafts. When the ramp goes down, a ladder goes down we made that would hook onto cliffs, and up they go.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Because there's a little bit more rocky coastline over there?

JOHN GAROFALO: Very rocky, it's just one little beach.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Right. Once you get into Tinian, what did they have you do?

JOHN GAROFALO: We worked on the field, all the time. North Field. All four strips.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: How long did it take you to get those all prepared for the aircraft?

JOHN GAROFALO: Months. I don't know how long.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Did they use the coral gravel there, or did they use the metal....

JOHN GAROFALO: No, Marston Strips? No. All coral. Blasting the hillsides. Crushing it up. One time we had 900 trucks, other battalions coming in, we worked 24 hours a day. The volume of coral was 3 times the volume of Hoover Dam. And how many million cubic square yards of coral. Incidentally I was there yesterday and rode on one of the original strips we built for the B29s in perfect condition.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Well, I'd like to maybe get into that just as we close the interview, talk about impressions today. Is there anything we haven't covered that you wanna talk about, about your combat experience?

Because a lot of people will never have the experience you had. And I know it's deeply emotional but is there some part of the story you'd like to tell us about that maybe we missed?

JOHN GAROFALO: Well, D-Plus-One, we had to bring ammunition to the frontlines. The frontlines are laying down. We had a wagon, it was American, with rubber tires, loaded with ammunition.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: With small arms ammunition?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yeah. The one in charge of the detail says, "Garofalo, swing your carabiner over your head." I feel secure holding it in my hand and pushing it with one hand. He said, "Push with two hands." Meanwhile, we had two [INAUDIBLE] submachine gun men guarding us, and two pulling also.

I was in the back alone, pushing the wagon over rough terrain. All of a sudden, hell breaks loose, everybody disappears, the wagon stop. I look and I see a Japanese, all behind one of the straps of my own helmet. And as I'm staring at him, holes are going into him, and little smoke rings are coming out.

He had no hair, was approximately seven, eight feet. He fell on his own grenade in front of me. He went up about two feet. Not one piece of shrapnel. It hit the ammo and boxes, but nothing hit me.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And didn't detonate? Any of that?

JOHN GAROFALO: No. And the fellows I thought abandoned me, they were the ones that were shooting at him. And they pulled me aside, and forced me to have a drink. I don't drink. It hit me about an hour later.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Scared you to death, about an hour later?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yeah. That's very close! [LAUGHS]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: There's a famous civil war veteran who said that in battle you don't have time to be scared, and neither do the dead.

JOHN GAROFALO: No.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: But afterwards, it hits you.

JOHN GAROFALO: After, it's a sort of a shockwave that comes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And you saw this guy face to face, and that was the enemy, he was gonna take you out?

JOHN GAROFALO: When he went down he was less than seven feet in front of me. But he fell on his own grenade. If he didn't....I guess you'd be interviewing somebody else.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Yeah. What other impressions of Saipan... I suspect this is the time to bridge over.... Why did you want to come back to Saipan, you came on your own? You're not with an organization?

JOHN GAROFALO: I came on my own. My wife says, “You’ve mentioned Saipan for years, go.”

[PH] Lenny Delumus called. He had already made arrangements, ‘cause he has a daughter that lives on the island. And my wife says, go. I had a problem, I couldn’t find my birth certificate, and getting my passport...but it was worth it.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: When did you start planning this trip?

JOHN GAROFALO: Immediately. I was notified a week before I came here. I had to work feverishly.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So, you really didn’t plan a year ago, you just....

JOHN GAROFALO: No! At the most, a week and a half.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And why did you have to come back here?

JOHN GAROFALO: I was always curious. One, I didn’t realize there were no more cemeteries. But, I lost a few buddies here.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Where are the bodies...?

JOHN GAROFALO: I guess the bodies were taken back home.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Did some of them go to Hawaii [PH] Punchbowl?

JOHN GAROFALO: I don’t know. But I wanted to see the memorials. I wanted to see the bomb pit. Because that bomb pit was right in our area on Tinian....

DANIEL MARTINEZ: The atomic bomb, where the [PH] Enola Gay loaded?

JOHN GAROFALO: Correct.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And that was right in your area? You wanted to be there?

JOHN GAROFALO: Just to see it. And to me, I think it’s a little, I wouldn’t call it a disgrace, because it’s such a tiny plaque for such an historic thing.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You think it warrants more attention?

JOHN GAROFALO: Definitely.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: How do you feel when you go around this island and you see the memorials that are being placed or have been placed? In particular, the Japanese memorials. How do you feel about those?

JOHN GAROFALO: Well, their memorials are more impressive than ours. They really went out for their deceased.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Do you think the American memorials have been neglected?

JOHN GAROFALO: Well, not really. But they're not as impressive. Except what I've seen this week. The 50th....

DANIEL MARTINEZ: The memorial that's being constructed in the national park?

JOHN GAROFALO: That's very nice.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: That's more uplifting to you?

JOHN GAROFALO: Correct.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: They're working pretty hard on getting it ready.

JOHN GAROFALO: Oh, boy! [LAUGHS] Day and night.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: As a former construction person, you can appreciate what they're going through, right?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yeah. They're a little too slow for my pace.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Were the CBs quicker?

JOHN GAROFALO: Oh, man!

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Well, immediacy of course....there was a war...

JOHN GAROFALO: There's a saying: "Rome wasn't built in a day." So we would say, "We weren't there at the time."

DANIEL MARTINEZ: [LAUGHS] What's your own emotional feeling coming back to Saipan? Are you feeling things you haven't felt or haven't been brought back in a long time?

JOHN GAROFALO: Oh yeah. I'm glad to be back.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Do you hope to meet old friends here?

JOHN GAROFALO: I doubt it.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: But this one fella, Lenny, hopefully you'll [SOUNDS LIKE] hook up with him.

JOHN GAROFALO: Yeah.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Is the island different than when you last left it?

JOHN GAROFALO: Oh yeah. The only thing I remember is the outlying [PH] Mount Appachu, which of course doesn't change. But everything changed.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Have you had a chance to travel around the island?

JOHN GAROFALO: Oh, we went all over. I went to The Grotto.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: What's The Grotto?

JOHN GAROFALO: The Grotto is in [PH] Marpea Point. The northern end of Saipan. Which now has a stair, it's very treacherous to go down. It's like a cavern with treacherous waters where people swim. I was told by the people from Saipan that they keep losing a lot of men, they drown there.

During my stay in Saipan, we found it and had to go down with a rope. We had to repel. But it's a beautiful thing. In Manhattan, I once bought a book on Micronesia. A forty dollar book. Just for me to have one page, which was The Grotto.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: ...Able to see that. So among the death and destruction that took place, there's also the beauty of Saipan.

JOHN GAROFALO: The beauty, yes. Gorgeous.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: With the 50th anniversary's passing throughout the country, we just observed Normandy and it had a lot of attention, some veterans have remarked that for the Pacific War, it's a neglected part of the history. The nation doesn't turn its attention to it. What's your view of that?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yes. The same thing. I feel the same thing. All I heard was Normandy, June 6th, and we were June 15th. Nine days later.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Wasn't this one of the most decisive battles of the Pacific War? This led to the fall of Japan.

JOHN GAROFALO: It was. Correct.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Whose fault is that?

JOHN GAROFALO: I really don't know. Why didn't we get the attention that was given to Europe? We lost a lot of men in the Pacific. Loads of men.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Climactic battles.

JOHN GAROFALO: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Primarily a naval island war.

JOHN GAROFALO: Yeah, like when we were on Saipan, D-Plus-Two or Three, so many Japanese were coming to destroy the American troops, and they ran into Test Force 58, which was called The Great Turkey Shoot of the Pacific. We shot down over 400 planes. And if they went through, we would have lost a lot of men.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: I might not be talking to you right now.

JOHN GAROFALO: Right. [LAUGHS]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Well, is there anything else you'd like to cover? Anything you'd like to tell me?

JOHN GAROFALO: Well, I'm reading a lot about North Korea. I'm not into politics, but to me it doesn't look good.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: We're observing this 50th anniversary and the possibility of conflict looms over the horizon.

JOHN GAROFALO: Yeah. That's why we have these prepositioned ships out in the Philippine Sea.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: The ones laying off here?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yeah. In fact, I was invited there the 16th at noon. He was explaining to me that each ship could supply a full division of men arms, food, and water for at least a month.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: A little different than from your day? What are you looking forward to the most with these observances here? What event are you looking forward to? Is it the dedication of that memorial at the national park service?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yes. The dedication. Yes. That would be the highlight. There's some recognition, finally.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: When you hear the word Saipan, what's the first thing that comes to your mind?

JOHN GAROFALO: Believe it or not, I feel good when I hear that word. I don't know why.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Because you survived?

JOHN GAROFALO: One of the reasons. The main reason, yeah. I don't see that word much in the States. I didn't realize there were so many luxurious hotels and roads, and the airport, what a difference from picking up rocks and sweeping, now I see they're building a tower now. Major Tower.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Right next to the old Japanese bunkers, and structures. 'Cause I was over there. Well, Joe, this has been a good recollection.

JOHN GAROFALO: One more question. I was on Tinian yesterday. And we went by boat. As soon as he saw me, he said, "I saw you on TV. No charge. You and your buddy go for nothing." That was nice. When we got to Tinian, we ended up in a little Fleming grocery store.

And Jimmy Collins, the announcer from Saipan, told me, "When you get to Tinian, call up the mayor. I know him well."

So we got there, called the mayor, and he happened to be on Saipan so his assistant was there. And I told him what Jimmy Collins stated, that I would get a tour. He says, “Hang loose, I’ll send somebody.” He sent this gentleman over, and gave us the most beautiful tour.

And he took me where they uncovered, June 11th, they were going through brush, moving earth. And they uncovered this vehicle from World War II. A landing craft. He took me there. We took pictures with it, and I picked up an old, rusty ammo box. And the petals that operate the craft, all rusty, and I’m donating them to the museum.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And which museum? The national park service museum?

JOHN GAROFALO: I don’t know. Whoever wants them. I mentioned it to Tom.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You haven’t decided yet. Well, good. Okay, it’ll be the National Park Service. I know we’ll be appreciative. [OVERLAPPING]

JOHN GAROFALO: This fella [PH] Facey, I gave them to him. He came to my hotel yesterday and said “Take this.”

DANIEL MARTINEZ: We’ll be looking at your photographs and such, and I suppose in a way Saipan is really coming back to your youth. You were how old when you were on Saipan?

JOHN GAROFALO: Oh, 22, 23, 24, three years. I got out in ‘45. I was 25.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Of course, the dropping of the atomic bomb meant your group was not going to Japan to invade?

JOHN GAROFALO: But we did get our gear 2 weeks before the bomb was dropped. So in the Pacific, we went to close.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Operation Olympic?

JOHN GAROFALO: Yes.

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DANIEL MARTINEZ: Thank you for this interview and sharing those real personal thoughts with us today.

JOHN GAROFALO: Thank you very much. Pleasure.

[END AUDIO]